

North Lake Union Stakeholder Working Group

Final Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

The North Lake Union Working Group was convened by the King County Department of Transportation in response to a King County Council budget proviso to study and make recommendations for the long-term use or disposition of King County Metro properties on North Lake Union in the South Wallingford neighborhood of Seattle. Members of the working group were selected to reflect the diversity of interests and perspectives of the area and included:

- Community residents
- Property and business owners
- Waterborne transportation advocates

The working group reviewed the possible uses for three properties on North Lake Union: the two Metro Transit properties (the upland or "tank farm" parcel and the waterfront parcel across the street); and the pier at the foot of Stone Way North owned by King County's current expenditure fund. The stakeholders were also asked to review possible linkages between the three properties. The group heard presentations on King County real estate procedures, site contamination status and waterborne transportation issues, and considered possible linkages of the various properties.

Given the range of perspectives within the working group, the group did not come to a consensus on all the issues. While the recommendations were agreed upon by a significant majority of the working group members, there is also a minority report reflecting the interests of some property and business owners and waterborne transportation advocates in the group.

RECOMMENDATION

The stakeholder working group determined that the King County Metro Transit properties on North Lake Union are currently underutilized community resources that could better serve the long-term goals of both King County Metro Transit and the community. The working group presents recommendations for each of the Metro Transit properties as well as for the Stone Way pier, waterborne transportation and possible linkages.

Upland parcel

The stakeholder working group recommends that Metro's "tank farm" property be preserved for the development of a public community facility that could:

- Fulfill unmet local community needs while serving as a resource for the wider region;
- Preserve the historic character of the site with its ties to Gas Works Park and to both the current maritime uses and industrial history of the area;
- Support a variety of uses on a scale that is pedestrian-friendly and consistent with the feel of the neighborhood;
- Relate to the North Lake Union waterfront through use and by capitalizing on and interpreting the viewscape of contemporary and historic marine industry and other water-dependent uses such as the Harbor Patrol;
- Preserve public territorial views of the Lake Union basin and the working waterfront;
- Employ and promote environmentally sound development and activities;
- Provide recreation opportunities, community meeting space, education and interpretive activities, aquatic uses;
- Blend in small-scale commercial and retail development serving the neighborhood in the existing buildings at the north end of the parcel along North 34th Street;
- Allow historic preservation of the buildings on the site; and
- Demonstrate and educate about water resource stewardship practices.

It is believed that these uses are consistent with neighborhood plans and would neither conflict with nor discourage the maritime industrial development along North Lake Union. Rather, it is believed that this development would celebrate, promote, and preserve the historic maritime and industrial nature of North Lake Union.

To allow time for further study, planning, and resource development to take place for this type of facility on this unique public site, the stakeholder working group recommends that Metro continue its current use of the site as a transit maintenance facility. This would allow time for the neighborhood plan stewardship group to explore potential funding possibilities for the project, such as:

- the renewal of the City of Seattle's Pro Parks Levy, which expires in 2008, or a special bond issue;
- a demonstration grant from the City of Seattle's Office of Sustainability & Environment;
- a water resources model-program grant from Seattle Public Utilities; and
- a variety of city, county, state and federal funding sources.

If successful in securing this funding, King County Metro Transit could be reimbursed for the fair market value for the upland parcel. In addition, the stakeholder working group also supports the following recommendations, believing these could generate revenue for Metro Transit in the near future from the use or sale of the upland parcel:

- explore the possibility of developing and leasing commercial and retail space in the existing "tank farm" building which fronts North 34th Street; and
- allow the sale of the property at fair market value to Seattle Public Utility, if interested, for them to use or swap as part of the expansion of their transfer station in South Wallingford with conditions for preservation and eventual public use consistent with the recommendations outlined above.

The stakeholder working group offers the following comments and recommendations relating to the Metro Transit budget and to the potential disposition process:

- Selling property to address short-term financial difficulties is shortsighted.
- It was an irresponsible fiduciary action to include projected revenues from the potential sale of the property in King County/Metro Transit's current budget.
- The budget timeline and RFP process drove the working group schedule and has precluded the pursuit of creative alternative funding sources for development of the parcels for a community facility.
- If in the future the property is to be sold, it should happen through a process that is better planned and in an atmosphere that will attract the greatest number of qualified bidders. Sale of the property should be conditioned to require mandatory participation in the City of Seattle's design review process.
- More time is needed to clarify the goals and costs of the King County Metro Transit Maintenance Facility relocation. This is best accomplished separate from the rush for sale and re-use.
- Some members felt that the County's requirement for surplussing had not been adequately met, and some others felt that the surplussing process was unclear.

Minority report on the upland parcel

Some of the stakeholder working group members recommend that King County Metro Transit explore the sale of the property to yield significant revenue for Metro along with relocation to a newly built transit maintenance facility. This disposition would provide Metro with revenue and a new, efficient facility. Private development of the parcel consistent with current zoning could also build new industrial facilities and increase the tax base and would not require the City of Seattle's design review process.

To that end, some members also felt that King County Metro Transit should move forward now with issuing a request for proposals for the upland parcel that would allow public or private development that would yield revenue and a new maintenance facility for Metro Transit in the near term.

Waterfront parcel

The stakeholder working group recommends that:

- the parcel be used as a working boat yard for the repair of historic vessels by non-profit organizations;
- the parcel be kept in long-term public ownership for activities that utilize both the shore and water assets of the site;
- users reimburse Metro Transit by paying competitive rent prices, providing improvements and upkeep of the property, and facilitating public access and viewing of repair activities; and
- the waterfront parcel should not be selected for waterborne transit because of the distance to parking and current transit connections and because of the existence of DNR leases.

It is believed that while retaining the property within public ownership, these uses complement both the maritime industrial character of the waterfront and the other public waterfront resources in the immediate area.

The stakeholder working group also believes it would be acceptable in the future for this property to be kept in the public ownership but be exchanged with the current waterfront site utilized by the City of Seattle's harbor patrol. This would heighten the visibility of law enforcement in the area and provide additional protection for marine users and businesses while allowing for the expansion of public-use facilities immediately adjacent to Gas Works Park.

Minority report on the waterfront parcel

Some members of the stakeholder working group believe that the waterfront parcel is a valuable yet underutilized property and recommend that Metro could generate significant revenue by leasing or selling the parcel at fair market value for private use or development consistent with existing zoning and maritime/industrial, water-dependent usage. Some also believe that this parcel would serve as the preferred terminal for waterborne transportation, possibly in combination with other private uses.

Stone Way Pier and waterborne transportation

The stakeholder working group recognizes the difficulty of implementing recommendations about the use or disposition of this property given that, unlike the King County/Metro Transit parcels, it is an income-generating property for King County's current expenditures fund and that the property is currently leased to a private party through 2024.

The stakeholder working group recommends that this pier would serve as the better location for vessels providing waterborne transportation, as this is in closer proximity to Metro Transit bus service, employers, and off-street parking. Even those members who prefer the Metro waterfront parcel for use for waterborne transportation believe that the Stone Way Pier would

be a good option for waterborne transportation service. Therefore, should the agency pursue implementing waterborne transportation service linking North Lake Union with other areas, Metro Transit should pursue subletting the necessary dock space from the current leaseholder. Pedestrian and public access should also be a priority. All new construction should be environmentally sound and include shoreline habitat enhancement.

Additionally, some members felt that additional study was required to see if waterborne transportation was needed and economically feasible for North Lake Union.

Linkage of parcels

The working group determined that the recommended uses for the North Lake Union properties do not require a linkage, including the recommendations for waterborne transportation.

However, some members of the working group believe that the recommended uses would be mutually reinforcing. The recommended development of the parcels could promote the current maritime and historic maritime industrial character of the area and have a "thematic linkage" with other public uses and properties in the area (i.e., Gas Works Park, the Burke-Gilman Trail, public waterways, walkways, etc.).

There is a strong desire to provide educational opportunities to model sound, innovative water collection and cleansing practices on both properties, to demonstrate water stewardship practices on both public and private industrial lands in the visible context of the Lake Union watershed and the shoreline salmon migration route. Water stewardship messages for the general public would be presented on the upland site, while water capture, cleansing and recycling in the waterfront boat yard would illustrate a specific solution to lake pollution concerns of marine industrial uses. The recommended use of the waterfront parcel will also allow views to the watershed basin from the upland parcel, which might otherwise be obscured by taller construction on the waterfront.

Certain uses of the upland site, such as housing and offices, may conflict with marine industrial use of the Metro waterfront parcel and neighboring marine industrial uses.

The working group recognizes that developing physical links would require major pedestrian improvements and public investment due to the volume of industrial and other traffic along North Northlake Way. The City of Seattle is currently funding coordinated studies of potential improvements to North and Northeast Northlake Way.

Respectfully submitted,

The North Lake Union Stakeholder Working Group

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